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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510 - 3505

October 23, 2020

The Honorable Dan Brouillette
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Secretary Brouillette:

I write regarding the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant in Piketon, Ohio and radioactive material previously discovered at the Zahn's Corner Middle School, just miles from the facility. As you know, the Department of Energy (DOE) has denied that the neptunium discovered at the school and other private residences in the community is related to activities at the site. As such, an independent third-party collection and assessment is currently ongoing. I remain concerned, however, that the Department continues to ignore the concerns expressed by the community, the local school district, and others in the region about their health and safety. The people of Pike County deserve to have these concerns addressed and remedied.

Beginning in the spring of 2019, the Scioto Valley Local School District closed the Zahn's Corner Middle School due to the discovery of transuranic elements at the school. It was later determined that the school would remain closed during the 2019-2020 school year as additional testing was performed. Understandably, parents, teachers, and students were worried about the long-term health impacts that could be associated with attendance at the school. In previous conversations with DOE, DOE has maintained that despite the proximity of the site to the school, it is highly unlikely the radioactive materials came from the site and has stated that sampling showed only "background levels" of these elements and that "there [is] no public health or safety risk from radioactive materials" at the school.¹ Further, DOE has suggested that transuranics discovered in the community are legacy contaminants from the Fukushima nuclear disaster that occurred in 2011. The presence of transuranics in the county at all is concerning, but it is the casual disregard for the community that is an outrage and ultimately undercuts DOE's credibility.

Now, as our nation struggles with the COVID-19 pandemic and countless schoolchildren across the country are forced into distance learning due to this Administration's inept response to the pandemic, the challenges in Pike County have become clearer. It is my understanding that sampling in the community was delayed due to the pandemic and is only now beginning. As such, the future of the Zahn's Corner Middle School remains uncertain

¹ Jessica Wehrman, "Feds Say Tests Show No Signs of Radioactive Contamination in Piketon; Scientist Skeptical," Columbus Dispatch, July 25, 2019, <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20190725/feds-say-tests-show-no-signs-of-radioactive-contamination-in-piketon-scientist-skeptical>

nearly 18 months after it was closed. My staff and I have met with community members on this matter on several occasions and it is clear that DOE has done little to earn their trust.

As such, it is imperative that DOE take meaningful steps to improve this relationship, including, but not limited to: 1) improving community engagement and providing assistance to the local school district for as long as the middle school building is closed to students, 2) working in good faith with the third party testing consultant, and, 3) should the sampling confirm that the transuranic materials can be traced to the Portsmouth Site, pay for the construction of a new school building.

I trust that the Department appreciates the urgency of this matter and commits to protecting the public health of the citizens of Piketon and the surrounding area. I look forward to your prompt response to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sherrod Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sherrod Brown
US Senator